

THE VALUE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS

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ABSTRACT

Peter Chalfin: The Value of Intercollegiate Athletic Participation from the Perspective of
Employers

(Under the direction of Erianne Weight)

Many companies specifically target former student-athletes when hiring employees (Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek, 2006; Soshnick, 2013). This study utilized attribution theory to identify which skills employers believe that student-athletes develop through athletics that make them more qualified to succeed in their industry. A survey of 50 employers revealed ten qualities/skills most strongly associated with athletic participation. Additionally, the employers' perceived value of athletic participation was significantly impacted by the athletic success and leadership experience of the student-athlete. The sport, level of competition and gender of the student-athlete were not found to have a significant impact on the perceived value of athletic participation. The results of this study add to the literature examining the value of athletics and support the argument that intercollegiate athletics are aligned with the goals of higher education as they help develop student-athletes into future leaders (Brand, 2006; Duderstadt, 2009).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With increasing support for the “pay for play” movement, it has become imperative that a true valuation of intercollegiate athletic participation be presented. Some of the often overlooked benefits provided by college athletics are the valuable skills developed by the student-athletes that they can use in their post-college careers. It is not uncommon to hear a former athlete state that he/she learned many life lessons through his/her participation in sports. But what, exactly, are these lessons that are being learned?

While anecdotal and limited research has shown that participation in intercollegiate athletics may make student-athletes more marketable when applying for employment (Long & Caudill, 1991; Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek, 2006), there is limited literature addressing this phenomenon. This study will contribute to the existing literature on the value of intercollegiate athletic participation by identifying specific tangible skills and intangible qualities that employers associate with intercollegiate athletic participation.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the specific tangible skills and intangible qualities that employers associate with former collegiate student-athletes. Many companies today specifically target former student-athletes when they hire new employees. This thesis attempts to find out why. In other words, what are the characteristics that these companies perceive to be

more prevalent amongst student-athletes than non-student-athletes that make them more qualified candidates for employment?

The results of this study provide a better understanding of how employers that are involved in the hiring process view intercollegiate athletic participation compared to a number of other experiences on a resume. In addition, the findings reveal differences in how employers may value a candidate's athletic experience based on his/her sport, gender, level of competition, athletic success and leadership experience.

Research Questions

Based on the review of literature, the following questions were formed for this study:

- RQ 1.** Why do certain companies specifically target former student-athletes when they are hiring employees?
- RQ 2.** What tangible skills and intangible qualities do employers associate with former student-athletes?
- RQ 3.** What types of organizations are most likely to specifically target former student-athletes when hiring an employee?
- RQ 4.** What types of recruiters are most likely to specifically target former student-athletes when hiring an employee?
- RQ 5.** How does intercollegiate athletic participation compare to other experiences on a resume in the eyes of an employer involved in the hiring process?

RQ 6. Is intercollegiate athletic participation valued differently by employers based on the student-athlete's gender, sport, athletic success, level of competition, or leadership experience?

Assumptions

1. The research methods used in this study are valid and reliable.
2. Survey participants will answer the survey questions truthfully and completely.

Delimitations

1. This study is only looking at employers that acknowledge that they specifically target former-student-athletes when they hire employees. A suggested future study would be to replicate these research methods and extend the survey to all companies, regardless of whether they target former student-athletes in the hiring process.
2. This study focuses on collegiate varsity student-athletes only, and discounts college graduates that may have participated in athletics at other levels such as high school, collegiate club, or intramural.

Limitations

1. This study is limited by the fact that the respondents must answer the survey questions based on generalizations and hypothetical employees. Putting a concrete value on athletic participation is not easily done, and it can not easily be compared to other extra-curricular activities that other college students may list on their resumes.

Definition of Terms

1. **Student-Athlete:** For the purpose of this study, the term "student-athlete" will refer to anyone who participated in an intercollegiate sport at the varsity level for at least one full season.
2. **Non-Student-Athlete:** Anyone who has not participated in an intercollegiate sport at the varsity level for at least one full season.
3. **Employer involved in the hiring process:** An employer who is considered to be “involved in the hiring process” is one who is involved in any of the following processes: Making the final hiring decision; making recommendations for hire; participating in the interview; recruiting candidates or screening initial candidates.

Significance of Study

With increasing support for the “pay for play” movement, it has become imperative that a true valuation of intercollegiate athletic participation be presented. Some of the often overlooked benefits provided by college athletics are the valuable skills developed by the student-athletes that they can use in their post-college careers. The role of intercollegiate athletics within higher education is under constant debate. The results of this study offer support for the argument that intercollegiate athletics are aligned with the goals of higher education as they help develop student-athletes into future leaders (Brand, 2006; Duderstadt, 2009; Long & Caudill, 1991; Henderson et al., 2006; Ryan, 1989). While it is commonly accepted that many life skills can be developed through participating in athletics, there is limited empirical data to actually support this notion. Additionally, very little research has been conducted to identify these specific skills. The lack of empirical research on this topic makes this study a critical and necessary addition to the existing body of literature on the benefits of intercollegiate athletics.

This research can also be used to disprove the “dumb jock” stereotype that athletes are inferior students (McCann, 2012). It is important to showcase the positive values that student-athletes possess beyond their athletic ability. Additionally, due to their time commitment to their sport, student-athletes are often unable to take advantage of summer internship opportunities (Soshnick, 2013). This lack of professional experience in some respects can put student-athletes at a disadvantage in the job market. However, the results of this research show that participation in athletics can make up for this lack of experience by providing student-athletes with many transferable skills that employers seek. Lastly, in a time when athletic departments are often forced to cut sports for budgetary reasons, this study demonstrates the non-financial value in providing these intercollegiate athletic opportunities for students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a thorough review of existing literature pertaining to the value of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of employers. First, the role of intercollegiate athletics within higher education is reviewed. This topic is broken down further into subtopics including the history of intercollegiate athletics, benefits of intercollegiate athletics, and criticism of intercollegiate athletics. The second section includes literature related to the skills developed by student-athletes through their participation in intercollegiate athletics. This section is broken down into three sub-groups: tangible skills and intangible qualities; building character through struggle and defeat; and educational growth and development. Next, this literature review presents previous research on critical factors in hiring decisions, first looking at evaluating resumes, then dissecting literature regarding former athletes in the workforce. Lastly, a conceptual overview of attribution theory – a theory that was tested in this study – is provided. The information gathered from the literature on these topics provides a concrete foundation for this study on the value of intercollegiate athletics from the perspective of employers.

Role of Intercollegiate Athletics within Higher Education

In 2012, just 23 of 228 athletic departments at NCAA Division I public schools generated enough revenue to cover their expenses (Berkowitz, Upton & Brady, 2013). The vast majority of these institutions rely on subsidies to cover this debt (Berkowitz et al., 2013). If intercollegiate

athletics is a “money losing” endeavor at most universities, there must be some non-financial justification for its existence (Henderson et al., 2006). What is the role of intercollegiate athletics within higher education? In order to answer this question, we must first review how and why intercollegiate athletics were initially formed.

History of Intercollegiate Athletics

From 1870-1900, students almost exclusively controlled and funded early college athletics (Chu, 1989). Sports were considered to be extracurricular activities and it wasn't until the 1920's that they were viewed as an element of an educational experience (Chu, Segrave, & Becker, 1985). By the early twentieth century, college administrators viewed athletic success as a means to generate money from the state, alumni and other donors (Chu, 1989). The resulting incentive to win at all costs led to players being paid under the table as early as the 1890s (Rader, 1999). The student-managed sports teams gave way to college and university-financed teams (Chu, 1989). The schools began to handle hiring and paying of coaches, scheduling and financing games and team travel, constructing athletic venues, and promoting college athletics (Chu, 1989).

With the increased financial-related stakes and incentives to win came the use of athletic scholarships in the 1930s. Struggling athletic conferences such as the Southwest and Southeastern conferences offered scholarships to lure athletes away from the Ivy League, the Big Ten and other stronger athletic conferences (Sperber, 2000). The concept of providing athletic scholarship faced immediate criticism, with the strongest disapproval coming from the Ivy League (Sperber, 2000). Despite this skepticism, athletic scholarships were accepted by the NCAA across the board in 1953 (Sperber, 2000). The Ivy League maintained its stance against the use of scholarships and league members still do not offer athletically-related financial aid to

their student-athletes. The Division III model of the NCAA also does not allow the use of athletic scholarships (Sperber, 2000).

Benefits of Intercollegiate Athletics

Multiple scholars have identified various ways that athletics benefit a university (Miller, 2003; Sperber, 1990; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Henderson et al. (2006); Brand (2006). First, sports aid the overall development of young people (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006; Brand, 2006).

Secondly, sports contribute to increased academic performance and upward occupational/social mobility (Miller, 2003; Long & Caudill, 1991). Various studies have demonstrated greater overall graduation rates and GPAs for athletes when compared to their non-athlete classmates in general (Long & Caudill, 1991); in Division I (Duderstadt, 2009), and Division II (Robst & Keil, 2000).

Other often cited benefits of college sports are that they generate money for the university, draw attention to the school, increase the school's academic prestige, boost student enrollment and improve school spirit (Miller, 2003; Duderstadt, 2009; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sperber, 1990; Sperber, 2000; Clotfelter, 2011).

While coaches, athletes, athletic administrators and even scholars often refer to this long list of ways that sports can benefit a university, there is minimal empirical evidence to support these popular notions.

Criticism of Intercollegiate Athletics

Various scholars refute some of these proposed benefits, while many others offer ways in which athletics actually harm a university and conflict with the mission of higher education

(Miller, 2003; Chu et al., 1985; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Thelin, 1994; Sperber, 2000; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Clotfelter, 2011).

The educational benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation have come into question due to recent and past incidents of low graduation rates, gross misconduct, academic scandals, and student-athletes leaving schools in poor academic standing (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Thelin, 1994; Sperber, 2000; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Clotfelter, 2011). To refute the arguments that student-athletes earn higher grades and graduate at higher rates than non-student-athletes, Chu (1989) points out the evidence of transcript alterations, recruiting violations, grade forging and the tendency for athletes to enroll in easier courses.

Duderstadt (2009) believes that these types of academic issues are specific to the sports of basketball and football. “In the majority of sports programs, athletes are students first and athletes second. They achieve academic honors just as frequently as other undergraduates do. However, football and basketball do not. These sports have developed cultures with low expectations for academic performance” (Duderstadt, 2009, p. 191).

To back up this statement, Duderstadt (2009) points out that only 41 percent of basketball student-athletes graduate. “It is hard to believe that giving scholarships to students who are not serious about academics is a better use of the taxpayers’ money than giving that money to academically-gifted students with the potential to become doctors or professors – in short the future leaders of America,” argued Ryan Miller (2003). Additionally, the average athlete on a top football or men’s basketball team enters college in the bottom quarter of his graduating class (Duderstadt, 2009).

“When you go to college, you’re not a student-athlete, but an athlete-student.

Your main purpose is not to be an Einstein but a ballplayer, to generate some

money, put people in the stands. Eight or ten hours of your day are filled with basketball, football. The rest of your time, you've got to motivate yourself to make sure you get something back.”

This statement made by former Indiana University basketball player Isaiah Thomas (qtd. in Sperber, 1990, p. 302), is a criticism of college athletics that is shared by many (Duderstadt, 2009; Sack and Staurowsky, 1998; Clotfelter, 2011). It is also a criticism that has existed since the beginning of intercollegiate athletics (Smith, 2011). A Harvard student publication from 1880 stated that “some students came to college for the avowed purpose of engaging in athletic contests” and “the object of their college course [was] quite as much college sports as college studies” (*Harvard Advocate*, 1880, p. 77).

To support the argument that student-athletes are more athletes than students, scholars often point to amount of time these student-athletes devote to their sports (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Duderstadt, 2009; Wolverton, 2008). A 2010 study conducted by the NCAA (2011) found that Division I Football Bowl Subdivision football players reported the highest weekly in-season athletic time commitment of 43.3 hours per week. Division I baseball and Football Championship Subdivision football players also reported more than 40 hours per week on athletics in-season. Division I men's basketball players report about 39 hours per week on athletics and Division I women's basketball players report about 38 hours per week. Even in Division III, student-athletes report spending at least 30 hours a week on their sport during the season.

The same study (NCAA, 2011) found that within several sports, the academics-athletics time balance shifted toward athletics. This was noted in Division I baseball, Division I FCS football, and Division II men's and women's basketball. Division I

baseball stood out with participants reporting spending more than ten hours per week more on athletics than academics during the season.

Critics take issue with not only the number of hours in a day that the student-athletes are required to spend on athletics, but also the number of days in a year (Miller, 2003, Sperber, 1990). “The length and intensity of seasons are positively ridiculous,” said the Reverend Timothy, J. Healy, the former head of Georgetown University (qtd. in Sperber, 1990, p. 35).

When it comes to the argument that athletics provide a university with positive attention, Miller refuted this by stating that “any positive attention can easily be offset by negative publicity” (Miller, 2003, p. 43). Miller also points to the Ivy League to show that athletic scholarships and major national championships are not necessary for academic prestige (Miller, 2003).

In a study done over an eight year period by researchers at San Jose State University, no empirical evidence was found to support the notion that sports builds character (Chu et al., 1985). The same researchers identified several major syndromes that are found in athletes. They define the “con-man athlete” as one who will do anything, including cheating, to get ahead. The “hyper-anxious athlete” gets abnormally nervous about playing well. The “athlete who resists coaching” is not teachable, while the “injury-prone athlete” will often use excuses, such as injury, to explain a lack of production. Lastly, the “depression-prone athlete” lets athletics affect his or her mental state (Chu et al., 1985, p. 268). While many suggest that athletics positively impact personal development (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006; Brand, 2006), the

research of Chu, Segrave and Becker indicates that athletics can actually inhibit personal development.

Now that a background on the role of intercollegiate athletics within higher education has been provided, this review of literature now turns to the various skills that scholars suggest can be developed through athletic participation.

Skills Developed through Athletics

Tangible Skills and Intangible Qualities

While there is a widely accepted notion that participating in sports can help develop skills that can be beneficial in various walks of life, there is limited empirical data supporting this belief. Although there has been a limited amount of research dedicated to identifying specific skills that are developed through athletics, there is a body of literature that references various skills that are believed to be developed through athletics.

Multiple studies have revealed skills that can be learned through athletic participation, such as discipline, dedication, sacrifice, integrity, leadership, ambition, perseverance, teamwork, work ethic and drive to succeed (Long & Caudill, 1991; Henderson et al., 2006; Ryan, 1989; Duderstadt, 2009; Soshnick, 2013; Williams, 2013). Summarizing many of these attributes, Keith Murnighan, the Harold J. Hines Distinguished Professor of Management and Organization at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management described student-athletes as "people who are disciplined, used to taking direction but able to take initiative" (Soshnick, 2013, ¶6). These skills learned by student-athletes will be useful in the labor market after they have completed their undergraduate studies (Henderson et al., 2006; Long & Caudill, 1991).

Ryan (1989) surveyed 3,800 student-athletes from the 1981 freshmen cohort to examine the role of athletic participation in contributing to student affective development. The results

showed that participation in intercollegiate athletics was associated with a high level of satisfaction with the overall college experience, motivation to earn a college degree, and the development of interpersonal skills and leadership abilities. Follow-up studies by Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora & Terenzini (1996) and Astin (1993) both supported these findings. However, multiple studies have actually shown that participation in intercollegiate athletics is negatively associated with involvement in and satisfaction with the college experience and career maturity (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimmick, 1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983; Stone & Strange, 1989).

In a special report to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Jay Olivia, chancellor and executive vice president for Academic Affairs at New York University, listed three ways in which athletics contribute to the development of character (Olivia, 1989). First, he believes that sports teach people how to handle pressure, which is integral to life outside of college. Olivia argues that athletics provide one of the few opportunities for students to put their talent and ego on the line and to exhibit strengths and weaknesses (Olivia, 1989). Secondly, Olivia (1989) believes that athletics provide young adults with the perfect setting to learn how to organize their life. Being able to balance practice, games, classes, travel and study requires discipline and the ability to determine priorities. These skills are useful and necessary in life (Olivia, 1989). Finally, Olivia (1989) suggests that sports require athletes to invest time, energy and commitment to a goal even in the face of possible defeat. Once again, this is an experience that can prove useful various areas of life.

Building Character through Struggle and Defeat

In his book, *Intercollegiate Athletics and the American University*, James Duderstadt, former University of Michigan president, states that “college sports provided an opportunity for

teaching people about character, motivation, endurance, loyalty, and the attainment of one's personal best – all great qualities of great value in citizens” (Duderstadt, 2009, p. 70).

Entrepreneur David K. Williams believes that athletes “have the drive to practice a task rigorously, relentlessly, and even in the midst of failure until they succeed” (Williams, 2013, ¶3).

Chu (1989, p. 65), uses a quote from General Douglas MacArthur to describe how character can be developed through sport:

“Sport is a vital character builder. It molds the youth of our country for their roles as custodians of the republic. It teaches them to be strong enough to know they are weak, and brave enough to face themselves when they are afraid. It teaches them to be proud and unbending in honest defeat, but humble and gentle in victory.”

Dick Cashin, managing partner at One Equity Partners, the private investment arm of JPMorgan Chase & Company, agrees that athletes can learn valuable lessons in defeat (Soshnick, 2013). “Everybody thinks sports is about winning,” said Cashin. “For me, it’s more about losing and then figuring out a way to win. It’s those things that make working with athletes and hiring former athletes a reasonable thing to consider” (qtd. in Soshnick, 2013, ¶2).

Northwestern’s Murnighan also believes that athletes gain a great deal from their struggles as well as their successes (Soshnick, 2013). “They have a high pain tolerance,” he said. “How does that sound for Wall Street?” (qtd. in Soshnick, 2013, ¶6).

Jesse Neumyer, a former Penn State football player turned private banker for Citigroup, believes athletes are battle-tested (Soshnick, 2013). “Somebody had put this

individual through a very difficult training program,” Neumyer said. “They’ve been tested and proven they can get through it – whatever it is” (qtd. in Soshnick, 2013 ¶24).

Thomas Rooke, a former Kansas State baseball player who works as a Technical Recruiter for TEKsystems in Houston, believes that athletes benefit from their ability to take constructive criticism in a positive manner (Rosche, 2013). “All of us have our strengths and weaknesses,” Rooke explained. “However, when you’re confronted with the negative feedback, truly successful people learn from these and move forward working to benefit from their struggles” (qtd. in Rosche, 2013, ¶6).

Not only do student-athletes respond better to constructive criticism, but they are also better at offering it, according to Dr. Michael Gillespie, a Duke philosophy professor (McCann, 2012). “It’s very difficult to get students to constructively criticize others,” said Gillespie. “But it’s less so for athletes” (qtd. in McCann, 2012, ¶24).

Educational Growth and Development

In addition to building character, multiple studies have shown that the activities engaged in by student-athletes have a positive impact on personal self-concept, allowing them to grow and develop in other areas (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella, Smart, Ethington & Nettles, 1987). A four-year, 250,000-student study by Dr. Will Barratt and Dr. Mark Frederick at Indiana State University measured educational growth in students among all ages, races, genders, majors, backgrounds, and school sizes (McCann, 2012). While the study was intended to learn more about college students in general – with no specific focus on student-athletes – the results revealed that student-athletes progress at almost double the speed of non-athletes in seven intangible academic categories. These seven skills, which Barratt and Frederick believe to be more

indicative of future success in the real world, are critical thinking, self-awareness, communication, diversity, citizenship, relationship and leadership (McCann, 2012).

“I’m the faculty member who used to say athletics is a waste of time and it’s stupid,” Barratt said. “Once I looked at this data, I realized I was wrong. I still don’t go to games, but I do understand the educational value behind athletics” (qtd. in McCann, 2013, ¶15). “We’re rather convinced that student-athletes are far more ready to face the world than non-athletes,” Frederick said (qtd. in McCann, 2012, ¶17).

A 1999 study by Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenizini, Edison, and Hagedorn contradicts some of these findings by reporting that male intercollegiate football and basketball players tended to have significantly lower levels of second-year writing skills and of third-year critical thinking and reading comprehension than non-athletes or athletes in other sports. However, the study also showed that female athletes and Olympic sport male athletes did not differ from non-athletes with regard to cognitive development (Pascarella et al., 1999). Therefore, Pascarella et al. concluded that “any negative cognitive influence of participation in intercollegiate athletics may be largely a function of the distinct disadvantages that accrue to football and basketball players” (Pascarella et al., 1999, p. 22).

Critical Factors in Hiring Decisions

The recruitment and eventual hiring of employees has been an important and relevant issue to researchers and practitioners in both the United States and European-based communities (Anderson, Lievens, van Dam, & Ryan, 2004; Salgado, 2001). However, very little research has been done to compare the value of intercollegiate athletic experience to that of other extracurricular activities on the resume of a job applicant.

Evaluating Resumes

Analyzing a resume to determine the qualifications of an applicant is a multi-layered process (Hakel, Dobmeyer, & Dunnette, 1970). Extracurricular activities are one of the three main components, along with academic qualifications and work experience (Brown & Campion, 1994; Singer & Bruhns, 1991; Nemanick & Clark, 2002).

Singer and Bruhns (1991) found that work experience was the most important factor in the eyes of hiring managers. However, Singer and Bruhns' study (1991) only compared work experience to academic qualifications, and did not take extracurricular activities into account. Soshnick (2013) pointed out that athletes are often overlooked in the hiring process because their busy schedules prevent them from gaining professional experience through internships. The findings of this thesis suggest that the skills developed through athletic participation may compensate for this lack of professional experience.

When looking solely at entry-level positions, academic qualifications take priority over work experience (Rynes, Orlitzky, & Bretz, 1997). Multiple studies have shown that a student's grade point average is often considered a reflection of his/her intelligence, motivation, and additional skills needed for a job (Roth & Bobko, 2000; Schmit, Ryan, Stierwalt, & Powell, 1995; Wolfe & Johnson, 1995).

Work experience is not weighted as strongly in entry-level candidates because their prior work experience is often minimal or not relevant (Kinicki & Lockwood, 1985). Also, Rynes et al. (1997) observed that recruiters often preferred applicants who had not been exposed to the procedures of previous employers, believing them to be more trainable and more open to different experiences.

Other research indicates that recruiters desire applicants with strong interpersonal skills (Rynes, Trank, Lawson, & Ilies, 2003) and often associate involvement in extracurricular activities with interpersonal skills, leadership, and motivational qualities (Rubin, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2002; Brown & Campion, 1994). Multiple studies have confirmed that extracurricular activities are an important component in resume evaluation (Field & Holley, 1976; Harcourt & Krizan, 1989; Hutchinson, 1984; Pibal, 1985), but there is less literature on which aspects of these activities are most valuable to an employer (Nemanick & Clark, 2002). Barratt and Frederick found that extracurricular activities such as student government and Greek life benefit a student in the seven intangible skills the same way that sports do (McCann, 2012).

Former Athletes in the Workforce

Specific to intercollegiate athletic participation, Long and Caudill (1991) found that former male athletes earned approximately a 4 percent wage premium in 1980. In their book *The Game of Life*, Shulman and Bowen report that student-athletes make about \$5,000 more per year than non-athletes (Shulman & Bowen, 2011; McCann, 2012). A 1990 study by Adelman revealed that varsity athletes at age 32 had a higher rate of employment and home ownership than the rest of the student body (Adelman, 1990).

In a follow-up to Long and Caudill's 1991 study, Henderson et al. (2006) found that not all fields valued athletic participation equally. While former college athletes were found to receive a wage premium in business, manual labor and military occupations, former athletes who went into high school teaching actually received lower than average wages. Henderson et al. identified specific skills that are common amongst student-athletes that would benefit them in these fields, such as teamwork and enhanced competitive drive in the business world and physical strength for manual laborers and military professionals.

Trading, investment banking and wealth management are other fields in which former athletes are believed to excel (La Roche, 2013). In a 2013 article from the Business Insider entitled *42 of the Biggest Football Players on Wall Street*, Julia La Roche attributes this correlation to the cut-throat, competitive environment present and the discipline and long hours required for success in both athletics and these professional fields (La Roche, 2013). In an article in Forbes magazine entitled *Why You Should Fill Your Company with 'Athletes,'* David K. Williams, a lifelong entrepreneur himself, argued that athletes make exceptional entrepreneurs (Williams, 2013). Williams attributes this success to athletes' ability to think strategically, focus on long-term goals, and put the strategy into action (Williams, 2013).

Liz Boardman, who conducts senior-level assignments for sports organizations at the executive search firm Russell Reynolds Associates, values the experiences gained from athletes who competed in sports. "If you're a swimmer or tennis player, you're working with a greater-than-I sort of mentality," she said (qtd. in Soshnick, 2013 ¶10). "That's the most coveted thing at a corporation, especially at the executive level."

According to Soshnick (2013, ¶3), "seeking accomplished jocks with good grades, especially women, for entry-level positions is becoming de rigueur on Wall Street." Boardman agreed, calling athlete-focused recruiting "a great, progressive idea" (qtd. in Soshnick, 2013, ¶7).

This trend in targeting student-athletes for employment has led to the creation of companies such as Career Athletes and Game Theory Group, aimed at connecting former student-athletes with potential employers (Soshnick, 2013, ¶25). Career Athletes CEO Chris Smith, a former Hawaii and Missouri State football player, described his company as LinkedIn for ballplayers (Soshnick, 2013 ¶25). In February of 2013, New York-based Drum Associates

opened the first division of an executive search firm that caters exclusively to current and former college athletes (Soshnick, 2013 ¶3).

Clearly, there exists a widely accepted notion that athletics provide a valuable experience that prepares individuals for successful careers. However, there is minimal empirical data to support this notion.

Conclusion

The mission statement of the National Collegiate Athletic Association is “to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes” (Office of the President, 2010, ¶5). Athletics can serve as a positive and powerful factor in the academic and overall success of student-athletes (Robst & Keil, 2000). While Henderson et al. (2006) pointed out that athletes learn valuable life lessons by participating in athletics, few studies have looked at what specific life lessons are actually learned. This thesis pinpoints the exact skills and qualities that student-athletes are believed to acquire or develop through athletic participation from the perspective of potential employers.

Theory

The theoretical foundation for this study is based upon attribution theory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Heider, 1958; Knouse, 1989), which states that people rely on certain informational cues to determine whether the ultimate cause of behavior is a result of factors that are internal (dispositional) or external (situational). Examples of internal attributions would be personality, motivation or ability (Knouse, 1989). External attributions would include task difficulty, environmental constraints, or luck (Knouse, 1989). Attribution theory can provide insight into how employers evaluate the relative contributions of person and environment to employment potential (Harvey, Weary, & Harris, 1981; Harvey & Weary, 1984; Kelley, 1973; Kelley &

Michela, 1980). Attribution theory has been used as a lens through which to view performance evaluation (Brown, 1984), leadership (Martinko & Gardner, 1987), conflict management (Baron, 1988), and decision making (Ford, 1985).

The appropriate attribution is determined based upon three criteria: distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus. Behavior is attributed to internal (dispositional) factors when it demonstrates low distinctiveness (different situations yield the same behavior), high consistency (behavior remains the same over time), and low consensus (different people display different behavior in the same situation) (Knouse, 1989). Conversely, when there is high situational distinctiveness (different situations yield different behavior), high consistency (the same situation results in the same behavior) and high consensus (different people display the same behavior in the same situation), then behavior is attributed to external (situational) factors (Knouse, 1989).

When it comes to the job interview, Tucker and Rowe (1979) found that interviewers that had read positive letters of recommendation were more likely to make internal attributions for applicant success. Conversely, those who read unfavorable letters were more apt to make internal attributions for applicant failure and external attributions for applicant success. These attributions often had a strong impact on the hiring decisions.

Multiple studies have shown that interviewers' ratings of internal traits are strongly influenced by nonverbal communication such as eye contact, smiling, posture, interpersonal distance, and gestures (Imada & Hakel, 1977; McGovern & Tinsley, 1978; Young & Beier, 1977). Taking it one step further, studies by Arvey and Campion (1982) and Rasmussen (1984) suggest that these nonverbal behaviors only enhance the verbal communication in the interview.

In other words, interviewees can benefit from exhibiting positive non-verbal communication, but only if they offered valuable verbal information during the interview.

This theory is relevant in the selection process of an employer in a hiring position, as they are actively seeking information about the applicant's skills and abilities. Recruiters use resume information to draw conclusions regarding the personality, motivation, abilities, and job fit of an applicant. As a result, recruiters may engage in a fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) by interpreting the presence or absence of certain resume information to be due to the applicant's dispositional factors. Fundamental attribution error may account for a recruiter to misidentify certain skills or abilities (or lack thereof) in an applicant, solely due to the presence or absence of certain information on a resume (Knouse, 1989). Attribution theory can be used to determine how the presence or absence of athletic participation on an applicant's resume will influence a recruiter's impression of the candidate. The opposite of fundamental attribution error is described by Harvey and Weary (1984), who observed a tendency to overestimate situational factors and undervalue the dispositional ones.

Knouse's 1989 review of literature regarding attribution theory as it relates to personnel employment selection is very relevant for this study. Knouse evaluated both attributions of the applicant in the job search as well as attributions of the potential employer in the selection process. Much of this literature focused on the attributions made by the applicants themselves. For example, Kulik and Rowland (1986) found that college seniors who considered their job search to be a success were more likely to make stable internal attributions (ability), while students who felt their job search was a failure were more apt to cite unstable external factors (bad luck). For the purpose of this study, attribution theory will mainly be used to interpret the attributions made by the employer on the perspective employee.

This study tests attribution theory as it applies to hiring former inter-collegiate student-athletes. If the theory holds true, employers, upon seeing intercollegiate athletic participation on a resume, will attribute certain tangible skills and intangible qualities to that candidate based upon their athletic experience. The literature on attribution theory suggests that these attributions made will have a significant impact on the hiring decision of the candidate.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

The target population for this study was employers who specifically target former student-athletes when they hire new employees. The sample has been compiled from three primary sources. First, recruiters present at a student-athlete career fair held at the Loudermilk Center for Excellence on the campus of UNC Chapel Hill were asked if they strategically target student-athletes when hiring employees. Those that responded affirmatively were then asked to participate in this study. The remaining two sources for subjects were two companies with similar objectives, the website www.careerathletes.com, and the company Game Theory Group. Both organizations strive to connect former student-athletes with companies that are seeking to hire former student-athletes. Between these three sources, 81 surveys were distributed via e-mail, and 52 subjects participated in the survey, for a response rate of 64%.

Instrumentation

Due to the unique nature of this study, it was necessary to develop an instrument specific to the research questions addressed. The instrument was compiled based on a foundational review of literature. In an effort to enhance validity, the survey was reviewed by a panel of experts, including six professors, one athletic administrator, and an expert in survey methodology from the Odum Institute for Social Science Research at the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to releasing the survey to the subjects, a pilot study with a sample size of 10 was conducted to confirm that the questions were clear and easily understood.

Each subject received a link to the survey via e-mail and completed the survey online using Qualtrics. Each question on the survey pertains to at least one of the six stated research questions. In addition to Likert scale questions, the survey also featured multiple choice, “check all that apply” and open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

After entering the quantitative data collected from the completed surveys into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS), various statistical tests were run to analyze the results. Descriptive statistics provided the means and standard deviations necessary to indicate which qualities are most commonly associated with athletic participation. For each quality/skill listed, a one-sample t-test was performed comparing the mean score to a score of 4.0 (moderately associated with athletic participation). Lastly, a total of 465 paired samples t-tests were run in order to test for significant differences between the independent variables of gender, sport, level of competition, athletic success and leadership experience of the student-athlete.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Demographics

Of the 50 participants for this survey, 60% (n=30) were female and 40% (n=20) were male. Twenty participants (40.8%) fell between the ages of 20-29, while 32.7% (n=16) were between 30-39, 14.3% (n=7) were between 40-49 and the remaining 12.2% (n=6) were 50 years or older. A large percentage (36%, n=18) of survey-takers identified themselves as former student-athletes. Among the former student-athletes, 67% (n=12) competed at the NCAA Division I level, two (11%) competed in NCAA Division II, three (17%) played in Division III of the NCAA and one participant (6%) competed in the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). A complete listing of respondent demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

<i>Demographic information of recruiters</i>		
	%	<i>n</i>
Sex		
Male	40.0%	20
Female	60.0%	30
Age		
20-29	40.8%	20
30-39	32.7%	16
40-49	14.3%	7
50+	12.2%	6

Student-Athlete?		
Yes	36.0%	18
No	64.0%	32
Level of Competition		
NCAA DI	24.0%	12
NCAA DII	4.0%	2
NCAA DIII	6.0%	3
NAIA	2.0%	1
Junior College	0.0%	0

With regard to the companies that employ the members of the sample, 42% were in the sales industry (n=21), 18% were in finance (n=9), 8% were in service/hospitality (n=4), 8% were in healthcare (n=4), 2% were in the engineering field (n=1), and the remaining 22% were in other industries (n=11). These companies varied in size, with 20% employing 500 workers or less; 16% employing between 501-1,000; 20% between 1,001-10,000; 18% between 10,001-100,000; and 6% employing more than 100,000 employees. The remaining 20% of respondents did not have an estimate for the number of employees with their company.

Each respondent was asked to estimate the percentage of employees at his/her company that are former student-athletes. The break down of responses to this question is provided in Table 2. More than half of the respondents (52.3%) indicated that their company has a company-wide policy/strategy to target former student-athletes when recruiting employees. See Table 2 for a complete breakdown of respondent company demographic information.

Table 2

<i>Demographic information of companies</i>		
	%	<i>n</i>
Industry		
Sales	42.0%	21
Finance	18.0%	9
Service/Hospitality	8.0%	4
Engineering	2.0%	1
Healthcare	8.0%	4
Other	22.0%	11
Number of Employees		
0-500	20.0%	10
501-1,000	16.0%	8
1,001-10,000	20.0%	10
10,001-100,000	18.0%	9
100,001+	6.0%	3
Don't Know	20.0%	10
% Former Student-Athletes		
<10%	10.0%	5
10-19%	10.0%	5
20-29%	12.0%	6
30-39%	2.0%	1
40-49%	4.0%	2
50-59%	2.0%	1
60-69%	4.0%	2
70+%	0.0%	0
Don't Know	56.0%	28
Policy?		
Yes	52.3%	23
No	47.7%	21
<i>N</i> = 50		

Qualities/skills associated with student-athletes

Participants were asked “How much do you associate the following qualities/skills with intercollegiate athletic participation?” They were asked to respond using the following five-point Likert scale: (1) not at all, (2) slightly, (3) somewhat, (4) moderately, and (5) very much.

Thirty-four of the 40 total respondents gave competitive nature the highest score (5, “very much”). This data supports a conclusion that competitive nature was the quality most associated with intercollegiate athletic participation ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 0.45$).

After competitive nature, the next highest scores were goal-oriented ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.54$); ability to handle pressure ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.63$); strong work ethic ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.78$); confidence ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.68$); and coachable ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.81$). Other qualities that scored significantly greater than 4.0 (moderately) were ability to work with others ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.73$); self-motivated ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.73$); mentally tough ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.79$); and time management skills ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.91$).

The negative characteristics included on the list all received mean scores below 2.0 (“slightly”). Being a bully received the lowest score ($M = 1.18$, $SD = 0.50$); with “dumb jock” ($M = 1.23$, $SD = 0.53$); sense of entitlement ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 0.92$); and arrogant ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.87$) higher, but still very low.

Table 3

<i>Qualities/skills associated with intercollegiate athletic participation</i>		
	Overall	
	Mean	SD
Competitive Nature*	4.83	0.446
Goal-Oriented*	4.63	0.540
Ability to Handle Pressure*	4.63	0.628
Strong Work Ethic*	4.45	0.783
Confidence*	4.41	0.677
Coachable*	4.38	0.807
Ability to Work with Others*	4.33	0.730
Self Motivated*	4.33	0.730
Mentally Tough*	4.30	0.791
Time Management Skills*	4.30	0.911
High Energy Level	4.15	0.770

Ability to Lead	3.98	1.000
Accountable	3.95	0.932
Integrity	3.55	1.061
Articulate	3.18	1.010
Intelligent	3.13	1.017
Arrogant	1.90	0.871
Sense of Entitlement	1.85	0.921
"Dumb Jock"	1.23	0.530
Bully	1.18	0.501

Note: Scale from (1) not at all to (5) very much

*Indicates mean score significantly greater than 4.0

Value of experiences listed on job candidates' resumes

Participants were asked to rate a variety of hypothetical college experiences on how valuable they would view them if listed on a job applicant's resume. The five-point Likert scale included (1) not valuable at all, (2) somewhat valuable, (3) valuable, (4) very valuable and (5) extremely impressive and would make this candidate stand out.

One interesting finding from these results is the very clear order of and distinction between different groupings. For example, all experiences involving being a captain of a sports team were grouped together at the top, followed by athletic All-Americans. After the All-American group were two extracurricular leadership positions (president of a fraternity and captain of the debate team). The next clear grouping is the student-athletes that were merely members of their respective teams but did not hold any supplemental title such as "captain" or "All-American." All student-athlete experiences were viewed to be more valuable than all remaining experiences, including part-time job as a manager at a restaurant, editor-in-chief of the student newspaper, member of the debate team, and resident advisor (RA) in a dormitory on campus. A complete list of the experiences and their associated descriptive statistics are included in Table 4.

Table 4*Value of experiences listed on job candidate's resume*

	Overall	
	Mean	SD
Captain of DIII women's tennis team	4.10	0.928
Captain of DIII men's tennis team	4.10	0.940
Captain of DI men's tennis team	4.08	0.944
Captain of DI women's tennis team	4.08	0.944
All-American on DIII men's tennis team	4.05	0.887
All-American on DIII women's basketball team	4.03	0.862
All-American on DIII women's tennis team	4.03	0.891
All-American on DI women's basketball team	4.03	0.903
All-American on DI men's tennis team	4.03	0.920
All-American on DI women's tennis team	4.03	0.920
All-American on DIII football team	4.00	0.946
All-American on DI football team	4.00	0.961
President of a fraternity	3.82	0.914
Captain of the debate team	3.78	0.974
Member of DIII women's basketball team	3.60	0.841
Member of DIII football team	3.59	0.910
Member of DIII men's tennis team	3.59	0.938
Member of DI women's basketball team	3.58	0.813
Member of DI football team	3.58	0.874
Member of DIII women's tennis team	3.58	0.931
Member of DI men's tennis team	3.53	0.987
Member of DI women's tennis team	3.53	0.987
Part-time job as a manager at a restaurant	3.45	0.904
Editor-in-Chief of the student newspaper	3.30	1.091
Member of the debate team	3.13	0.822
Resident Advisor (RA) in a dormitory on campus	3.08	1.023
Volunteer for Boys and Girls Club	3.05	0.916
Part-time job as a waiter at restaurant	2.95	1.085
Reporter for the student newspaper	2.70	0.939
Played trumpet in the marching band	2.55	0.815

Note: Scale from (1) not valuable at all to (5) extremely impressive and would make this candidate stand out

Impact of select independent variables on perceived value of intercollegiate athletic participation

Paired-sample t-tests were run to analyze the impact of five independent variables on employers' perceived value of inter-collegiate athletic participation. These five independent variables were gender, sport, athletic success, level of competition and leadership experience. The results revealed that both athletic success and leadership experience have a statistically significant impact on perceived value of athletic experience. The tests for gender, sport and level of competition did not yield significant findings. The results were remarkably consistent, as every single comparison made testing athletic success or leadership experience yielded a significant finding, and every comparison made testing gender, sport and level of competition did not yield a significant finding. Tables 5 and 6 provide a listing of all significant statistical findings.

Gender

None of the t-tests to analyze the effect of gender on employers' perceived value of athletic experience yielded significant findings. In fact, in most cases, the mean score for the male athlete and the female athlete in the same sport and at the same level of competition were nearly equivalent. For example, a male Division III tennis captain ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.916$) had almost the exact same mean and standard deviation as a female Division III tennis captain ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.926$). The t-test comparing these two obviously did not yield a statistically significant difference between the two means $t(41) = -1.000$, $p = 0.323$.

Sport

The tests analyzing the impact of sport on the perceived value of athletic participation also yielded non-significant findings. While the mean for a male Division I football player ($M =$

3.60, $SD = 0.877$) was slightly higher than the mean for a male Division I tennis player ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.008$), the paired sample t-test comparing the two showed no statistically significant difference between the means $t(42) = -1.138$, $p = 0.262$. These findings were consistent for all other tests analyzing the independent variable of sport.

Athletic Success

For the purpose of measuring athletic success as an independent variable, the rating of an All-American student-athlete was compared to that of a student-athlete participating in the same sport at the same level that was not named All-American. As shown in Table 5, athletic success was shown to have a significant impact on the perceived value of athletic participation in every test that was run. In each case, an All-American student-athlete received a higher mean score than a non-All-American member of the team in the same sport. See Table 5 for the statistical impact of athletic success on the perceived value of athletic experience.

Table 5

Impact of athletic success (team member vs. All-American) on employer's perceived value of a student-athlete's experience

	Member		All-American		Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean 1	SD1	Mean2	SD2			
DI Men's Tennis	3.53	1.008	4.02	0.963	-0.488	-4.35	.000
DI Women's Tennis	3.53	1.008	4.02	0.963	-0.488	-4.352	.000
DI Football	3.60	0.877	4.00	1.000	-0.395	-3.560	.001
DI Women's Basketball	3.60	0.828	4.02	0.950	-0.429	-3.767	.001
DIII Men's Tennis	3.55	0.942	4.05	0.936	-0.500	-4.583	.000
DIII Women's Tennis	3.53	0.935	4.02	0.938	-0.488	-4.557	.000
DIII Football	3.60	0.912	4.00	0.988	-0.405	-3.420	.001
DIII Women's Basketball	3.58	0.823	4.02	0.913	-0.442	-3.950	.000

Level of Competition

There was no significant difference found for any comparisons testing the independent variable of level of competition. For example, when comparing a female Division I basketball player ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.821$) to a female Division III basketball player ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.823$), no statistically significant difference is found $t(42) = 0.443$, $p = 0.660$. Therefore, the findings suggest that employers do not value any level of intercollegiate athletic competition any more or less than the other levels.

Leadership Experience

For the purpose of assessing the impact of leadership experience on the perceived value of athletic participation, a student-athlete that was the captain of his/her team was compared to a student-athlete in the same sport at the same level that was not a captain of the team. In each comparison made, the mean score of the captain was statistically significantly higher than the non-captain. Therefore, this data indicates that leadership experience significantly and positively affects the perceived value of athletic experience in the eyes of employers.

Table 6

Impact of leadership experience on the employer's perceived value of a student-athlete's experience

	Member		Captain		<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean 1</i>	<i>SD1</i>	<i>Mean2</i>	<i>SD2</i>			
DI Men's Tennis	3.53	1.008	4.12	0.942	-0.581	-6.496	.000
DI Women's Tennis	3.53	1.008	4.12	0.931	-0.581	-6.496	.000
DIII Men's Tennis	3.55	0.942	4.12	0.916	-0.571	-6.274	.000
DIII Women's Tennis	3.53	0.935	4.14	0.915	-0.605	-6.369	.000

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Company Policy

More than half of the respondents (52.3%) indicated their company has a company-wide policy/strategy to target former-student athletes when recruiting employees. Multiple respondents indicated this policy came about due to a history of success by former student-athletes within the company. “The proof is in the pudding by how many people are in upper management that were athletes,” said a female talent acquisition manager in the sales industry. “Anyone who is managing or working with an athlete understands the value and encourages more hiring with athletic background. We love athletes and some of our top Regional Vice Presidents, General Managers and several other high level roles were athletes in college” (Respondent 16).

Some recruiters target student-athletes not due to a company-wide policy but as part of their own personal strategy. A 36-year-old female recruiter in the sales industry stated, “I’ve been in the recruitment industry for 13 years, so it’s not so much a ‘policy’ per se but a proven recruiting strategy for myself. We have found success in hiring former varsity athletes” (Respondent 12).

Qualities/skills associated with student-athletes

The results of this study support previous research that suggests that athletic participation can help develop skills such as discipline, dedication, sacrifice, integrity, leadership, ambition, perseverance, teamwork, work ethic and drive to succeed (Duderstadt, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006; Long & Caudill, 1991; Ryan, 1989; Soshnick, 2013; Williams, 2013).

Many of the written responses within the survey support the findings provided in Table 3. For example, the female talent acquisition manager in sales (Respondent 16), who has been involved in approximately 500 hires over the past five years, and estimated that 20% of those hires were former student-athletes stated, “we view athletics in college as a full-time job, where other employers may not. The time, effort and dedication the candidate has by committing time to a sport can be easily translated to our work environment. We have a very competitive culture here. Student athletes have a great opportunity for leadership at a young age which makes them perfect for our culture.”

Many of the former student-athletes who took this survey made reference to the time commitment involved with college athletics, having participated themselves. “If you are an NCAA athlete, then you know what it takes to be successful,” said a 43-year-old former Division II baseball player and current Vice President in the sales industry (Respondent 39). “Those long hours of training, pushing through the pain and challenges, even when you thought it was too hard. You stayed focused and stuck to the plan because you know that is what it takes to win. When you are an athlete at the highest level, those feelings never leave you. It will always be a part of who you are. These same life lessons you learned in sports directly translate to success in business. Teamwork, individual accountability, a strong work ethic and adaptability are some of

the key attributes of successful employees.” Of the approximately 200 hires that Respondent 39 was involved in over the past five years, he estimated that 25% were former student-athletes.

Many participants identified the qualities and skills of student-athletes that are beneficial in their particular industry. Multiple respondents from the sales industry cited competitiveness as a key quality. A 31-year-old Director of Internship Development in the Finance industry (Respondent 43) stated that “student-athletes have the natural skillset that transfers well to a financial representative. We need people who are disciplined, competitive, and coachable. One out of six of our full-time reps are former student-athletes.”

Some of the characteristics provided in the written responses that were not included in Table 3 included aggressiveness, diversity, motivation, success, holding themselves to a higher standard, the ability to overcome obstacles and disappointment, and the ability to critically and honestly assess failures.

The negative characteristics included on the list all received mean scores below 2.0 (slightly). While multiple studies question the educational benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation (Clotfelter, 2011; Duderstadt, 2009; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sperber, 2000; Thelin, 1994), the “dumb jock” stereotype is not one that this sample of recruiters associates with student-athletes, as 33 of the 40 respondents answered “not at all” (1) for “dumb jock.”

Among the positive qualities included on the list, integrity scored comparatively low ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.06$). Perhaps this is a result of the long history of athletic-related scandals, involving cheating, gambling, gross misconduct and academic fraud (Clotfelter, 2011; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998; Sperber, 2000; Thelin, 1994).

The findings of this study are consistent with attribution theory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Heider, 1958; Knouse, 1989), which states that people rely on certain informational cues to determine whether the ultimate cause of behavior is a result of factors that are internal (dispositional) or external (situational). The results show that there are indeed certain skills and qualities that employers attribute to former student-athletes, just as the theory would suggest. As a 24-year-old female campus recruiter (Respondent 9) put it, “student-athletes have those unteachable skills necessary to be successful in our industry.”

According to this study, upon seeing intercollegiate athletic participation on a resume, employers would be likely to associate that candidate with qualities such as competitive nature, the ability to handle pressure, and being goal-oriented. As Knouse (1989) found, some attributions are strictly internal (competitive nature, self-motivated), while others involve some external factors (overcome adversity, deal with defeat). These attributions would likely play a key role in the evaluation of the candidate and ultimately influence the hiring decision. These findings support previous research citing the positive impact athletics can have on personal development (Brand, 2006; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Henderson et al., 2006) while opposing the research of Chu et al. (1985) which indicates that athletics inhibit personal development.

Value of experiences listed on job candidates’ resumes

Overall, experiences involving athletic participation compared favorably to non-athletic experiences on a resume, supporting the argument that that sports contribute to upward occupational mobility (Long & Caudill, 1991; Miller, 2003). It is not surprising that, within the athletic experiences, those that involved serving as team captain consistently scored the highest. This supports the findings of Long & Caudill (1991), and Henderson et al., (2006) that the development of leadership through athletics will be useful in the labor market and therefore

coveted by businesses. However, non-athletic experiences that also require leadership skills, such as president of a fraternity ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.914$), captain of the debate team ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.974$), and editor-in-chief of the student newspaper ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.091$) scored lower. This is interesting because compared to playing a sport, these roles traditionally provide experiences much more relevant to the business world.

One dynamic of athletic participation that sets it apart from non-athletic experiences is the teamwork that is required. For many companies, the ability to work as a team is critical (De Vries, 2000; Tarricone & Luca, 2002). A 52-year-old former Division I basketball player and current CEO in the healthcare industry (Respondent 28) explained why former athletes are better prepared to work with others: “Culturally, they also collaborate better, respect the other team members, understand roles and responsibilities across the team and keep an eye towards the broader vision and mission for the organization.”

Perhaps the best example from Table 4 to illustrate the value that these employers see in athletic participation is the fact that every example of merely participating on a varsity sport team in college received a higher mean score than being editor-in-chief of a student newspaper. The role of editor-in-chief of a student newspaper is traditionally viewed by employers in very high regard, as it requires skills such as leadership that are useful in the workforce (Hewitt, 2002). The fact that being a member of a varsity athletic team regardless of the sport or level of competition rated higher than editor-in-chief of a student newspaper speaks volumes to the value employers see in athletic participation.

The results shown in Table 4 help explain why previous studies have found that former student-athletes earn higher wages than non-athletes (Adelman, 1990; Long & Caudill, 1991; McCann, 2012; Shulman & Bowen, 2011). The results indicate that athletic participation is

valued highly by employers, making them more attractive candidates, and therefore entitling them to higher wages.

Gender

None of the t-tests that were run to analyze the effect of gender on the perceived value of athletic experience yielded significant findings. This suggests when evaluating candidates, employers do not value participation in athletics any more or less for males than they do for females. In other words, the experience of participating on the varsity tennis team in college is equally valuable for men and women in the eyes of employers.

Sport

The tests analyzing the impact of sport on the perceived value of athletic participation also yielded non-significant findings. These results suggest that employers do not value the experience of participating in one sport over that of another. As long as all other factors are equal (level of competition, athletic success, leadership experience), an employer values a tennis player the same amount they value a football player. Given that football is considered a more “high profile” sport and is generally considered to be a larger time commitment (NCAA, 2011; Wolverton, 2008), one may have surmised that being a member of a football team would carry more weight on a resume than being a member of a tennis team. These results indicate that this is not the case, however.

Conversely, with multiple reports suggesting that football student-athletes are underprepared academically and are more likely to leave school in poor academic standing, one may have surmised that employers value football players less than other sports as they may be skeptical of their academic merit (Clotfelter, 2011; Ganim, 2014; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Gurney &

Stuart, 1987; Phillips, 2008; Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). Once again, however, these findings refute this hypothesis by showing that the sport does not have a statistically significant impact on the perceived value of the athletic participation.

Level of Competition

Level of competition is another independent variable that could have been predicted to impact the perceived value of athletic participation in either of two completely different ways. On one hand, Division I is the highest level of intercollegiate athletic competition, so it would make sense for Division I athletes to be more coveted than their Division III counterparts. On the other hand, however, the Division III model is widely considered to be more student-athlete focused with a stronger emphasis on academics than Division I (Naughton, 1997; NCAA, 2014). As a result, employers may value the experience of a Division III athlete more than that of a Division I athlete. The results of this study, however, suggest that neither of the above two hypotheses are true, as level of competition does not have an effect on the perceived value of athletic participation.

Athletic Success

As shown in Table 5, athletic success was shown to have a significant impact on the perceived value of athletic participation in every test that was run. In each case, an All-American student-athlete received a higher mean score than a non-All-American member of a team in the same sport. Upon initial glance, this seems logical. Wouldn't an All-American athlete be more coveted than another athlete in the same sport that lacked this prestigious honor? However, with regard to qualifications to work in the business world, does it necessarily follow that a more successful athlete would make a better employee? This study revealed that employers target student-athletes because they associate them with the following qualities:

competitive nature, ability to handle pressure, goal-oriented, strong work ethic, confidence, coachable and ability to work with others. Is an All-American tennis player more likely to possess these qualities than a non-All-American on the tennis team, just by virtue of the fact that he/she is an All-American? According to the results of this study, these employers must believe the answer to that question is yes.

To achieve All-American status, it's reasonable to deduce that a student-athlete must possess a strong determination to succeed. Employers may have the viewpoint that these student-athletes are just "winners" and will succeed in whatever venture they pursue. Perhaps it is not necessarily the superior athletic ability that makes All-American athletes more attractive job candidates, but rather their attainment of excellence in general. A 33-year old former Division I women's volleyball player and current corporate recruiter in the service/hospitality industry referred to this trait of student-athletes as a "unique drive for success" (Respondent 1).

One comparison that can be made to test this hypothesis is to compare a Division III All-American to a Division I non-All-American member of the same sport. One cannot determine which of these two candidates has more athletic ability. While the Division III student-athlete was successful enough to earn the All-American honor, the Division I student-athlete was competing against a higher level of competition. It's possible that the Division I student-athlete could have been an All-American had he/she chosen to compete at a Division III school. Therefore, a statistically significant mean score favoring the Division III All-American would speak to their determination to succeed, rather than their superior athletic ability.

When comparing the female Division I tennis member ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.008$) to the female Division III tennis All-American ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.938$), a statistically significant difference between the two means is found $t(42) = -4.172$, $p = 0.000$. Once again, this was

consistent for all similar comparisons that were made. In each sport for both genders, the Division III All-American had a statistically significant higher mean score than the Division I non-All-American. These findings suggest that employers covet All-Americans, not necessarily for their superior athletic ability, but rather their drive to succeed.

If a high school student-athlete is trying to decide whether to compete at a Division I school or a Division III school, this finding could prove very useful for the student to assist with this decision. If the goal for this student-athlete is to find a job after graduating college, she would want to make herself as marketable as possible. If she feels, based on her skill level, that she would thrive in Division III and potentially be an All-Conference or All-American athlete – but has doubts about how much playing time she would receive on a Division I team – she may wonder which experience would be more impressive in the eyes of employers. According to the results of this study, her resume would be viewed more favorably if she was an All-American athlete in Division III than if he was just a member of a Division I team.

Leadership Experience

In each comparison made, the mean score of the captain was statistically significantly higher than the non-captain. Therefore, this data indicates that leadership experience significantly and positively affects the perceived value of athletic experience in the eyes of employers. Serving as team captain suggests leadership ability and the respect of one's teammates, both characteristics that are desired in the workforce (Kuhn & Weinberger, 2005). These findings may support Kuhn & Weinberger's (2005) findings that former team captains go on to earn higher wages. Notably, as shown in Table 3, the ability to lead received a mean score below 4.0 ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.00$), indicating that respondents believe that merely participating in college athletics doesn't necessarily imply the ability to lead.

In each comparison, the mean difference between a captain of a team and just a member of that same team was always greater than the mean difference between the member of the team and an All-American for that same team. In other words, while employers value athletic success, they value leadership experience even more. This was evident in Table 4, as the four most highly rated resume experiences were all student-athlete captains.

Future Studies

There are many related studies that would make excellent follow-up studies to this thesis. The most logical follow-up would be to replicate this exact study but open the survey up to all companies, rather than limiting participants to employers that strategically target former student-athletes in the hiring process. The purpose of this thesis was to analyze the employers that deliberately target student-athletes and investigate why they utilize this strategy. The goal was to uncover the specific skills and characteristics that these employers believe student-athletes develop through participation in intercollegiate athletics that set them apart from non-student-athletes and makes them more qualified employees. Replicating this study and opening it up to all companies will provide a better idea of what percent of companies actually apply this strategy of targeting student-athletes. Additionally, this follow-up would also show how the other companies that don't target student-athletes view participation in intercollegiate athletics. Perhaps they don't associate the same skills and qualities with athletes. Or, maybe they do, but those aren't the skills necessary in their particular field. This would also provide a strong overview of which specific industries are more likely to target student-athletes. It would also be worthwhile to investigate which skills are the most coveted for each industry, and see which industries align most closely with the skills commonly attributed to former-student-athletes. These findings could prove to be tremendously valuable if it is found that a certain industry that

doesn't currently target student-athletes could benefit greatly from the skill set of student-athletes.

This study investigated the value of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of employers. Investigating the value of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of the student-athletes themselves would also be a compelling study. Instead of surveying employers, the survey would be disseminated to former student-athletes that are currently employed. They would be asked to provide their feedback on what skills and qualities they believed they developed from their participation in college athletics. These former student-athletes could share specific examples from their athletic careers where they learned valuable lessons or skills. Similarly, they could also provide specific examples from throughout their professional careers where they utilized these skills. It would also be interesting to have them compare the value of their athletic experience to their academic experience in college to see which they believe benefited them more in their professional career.

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